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*"The Rift Within
❖ ❖ ❖ The Lute"*

A Play in One Act

BY

CHAS. H. DICKINSON AND ARTHUR GRIFFITHS

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“THE RIFT WITHIN THE LUTE”

A Play in One Act

BY

CHAS. H. DICKINSON AND ARTHUR GRIFFITHS

*First produced on Thursday, November 10th, 1898, at the Duke of
York's Theatre, and afterwards in front of "Lord and Lady
Algy" and "The Cuckoo," at the Avenue Theatre;
reproduced at the Strand Theatre, on in
front of "The Lady of Ostend"*

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AVENUE THEATRE.

JOHN STANMORE Mr. Wilfred Draycott.
REGGIE BEAUCLERK Mr. Hugh Goring.
SQUIRE HEATHCOTE Mr. H. Stephenson.
KNIGHT Mr. R. Lister.
MARY STANMORE Miss Bella Graves.

DUKE OF YORK'S THEATRE.

November 10th, 1898.

JOHN STANMORE Mr. Ernest Leicester.
REGGIE BEAUCLERK Mr. Arthur Edmunds.
SQUIRE HEATHCOTE Mr. W. R. Staveley.
KNIGHT Mr. Graeme Goring.
MARY STANMORE Miss May Warley.

CHARACTERS.

JOHN STANMORE, *a wealthy stockbroker, age about 45.*
REGGIE BEAUCLERK, *a young sub. in the 14th Lancers, age about 22.*
SQUIRE HEATHCOTE, *Mary Stanmore's father, age about 80.*
KNIGHT, *John Stanmore's old butler, age about 50.*
MARY STANMORE, *John Stanmore's wife, age about 35.*

SCENE AS SET.

curtains door door.
 easel curtains
window
fireplace large couch
 table
 desk armchair
armchair armchair
door door

“THE RIFT WITHIN THE LUTE.”

SCENE.—*A very handsomely furnished room, with large anteroom at L. U. E., space between hung with heavy curtains ; large saddlebag chair and a double couch R.; up L. is an easel on which is a picture draped; R. C. a desk with revolving chair ; table down L. by side of couch. The room must have the appearance of every luxury. Fire alight. As the curtain rises, KNIGHT, an elderly, very respectable man-servant, is arranging the evening newspapers on table ; he then walks round the room and switches on the different electric lights.*

KNIGHT. Somehow or other I'm happier when the lights are lit ; things seem brighter, and even this place seems a bit more cheerful—a bit more like home. Ah ! all the lights in the world, and, what's more, all the comforts, will never make *this place* look like home. Well, I'd give something to hear the governor say to me, “Knight, we're going back to Westhorpe next week ; you'd better go down a day or two earlier, just to look after your cellar.” The cellar ! *my* cellar !! Ah ! (*sighs*) Shall I ever see it again I wonder ? Those rows of Cockburn's '63 ; the few bottles of '48 and then the governor's Steinberg Cabinet. How he used to enjoy it ! “Knight,” he used to say, “what shall we drink to-night ?” *We !* He always spoke like that when things were well and happy and the mistress was at Westhorpe, but now—he never says anything—I have to do all the talking, and he don't care what he eats, or, what's worse, what he drinks. Well, I've thrown in my lot aside of his, and all the talking in the world won't make it any better. Ah ! there's his key.

Enter JOHN STANMORE, a well-dressed, somewhat gray-haired man of about forty to forty-five ; he looks worn and tired. KNIGHT goes and helps him off with his coat, takes his hat and stick. Also enter REGGIE BEAUCLERK, a good-looking young fellow about twenty-two, fair and somewhat weak looking. BEAUCLERK goes to fireplace and stands looking into fire.

STAN. Any letters, Knight ?

KNIGHT. They are on your desk, sir. Will you dine at home, sir ?

STAN. Yes. I don't feel up to going out.

KNIGHT. Do you dine *alone*, sir ?

STAN. Yes, Knight, *alone*. (*sadly*)

KNIGHT. Very well, sir. (*exit KNIGHT. STANMORE goes to desk and begins opening first letter, then notices BEAUCLERK, who has turned round from fireplace*)

BEAU. I suppose I had better go.

STAN. (*passing hand over forehead*) Excuse me, Reggie, I had forgotten all about you. I have these absent fits sometimes. You wanted to see me, my boy. What is it about ?

BEAU. (*somewhat sullenly*) Money.

STAN. Ah ! (*sighing*) Why don't you go to your grandfather or your aunt, my wife ?

BEAU. Because she has already done everything I can honestly ask, and because I—I am ashamed to go to my grandfather and tell him the truth.

STAN. Ashamed ! You have done nothing dishonorable ?

BEAU. No, not so bad as that, but I—I'm in trouble ; I've been fool enough to lose more money than I can pay ; cards at the club ; and if I can't settle by Friday I shall be posted.

STAN. Reggie, your grandfather allows you a handsome income. You are in a crack cavalry regiment, with a big prospect in front of you, and yet—yet you can't keep away from those cursed cards.

BEAU. (*touchily*) I know I have been a fool and I know it's not the first time—but for God's sake don't *you* preach to me ! Cards have no interest to you. It's easy enough for you, a stockbroker, to resist gambling after hours, because you are up to your eyes in it all day long, and you're sick of it ; but for us poor military loungers,

with sometimes nothing to do all day, it's a pretty hard tussle to resist temptation.

STAN. Don't get angry, Reggie—and don't think I want to preach. (*pause*) Who did you lose the money to; and where?

BEAU. To Captain Vallaris, at the club.

STAN. He's a bad egg, Reggie.

BEAU. At any rate, he must be paid.

STAN. (*quietly*) How much?

BEAU. A few hundred.

STAN. (*quietly and kindly*) How much, Reggie?

BEAU. Something under five hundred.

STAN. (*smiling*) How much, my dear Reggie?

BEAU. (*somewhat ashamed*) Four hundred and fifty.

STAN. The total, Reggie?

BEAU. On my word—as a gentleman.

STAN. You were right to come to me, my boy. (*goes to desk*) I'm not going to say, Don't do it again. I am only going to ask you not to worry or bother your aunt. She is very fond of you, Reggie, and for her sake, my lad, have a good try for the future. Will you? (*writes cheque*) There's the money. (*tears out cheque and places it on corner of desk and rises*) And when you play cards again—play with a gentleman.

BEAU. How can I thank you?

STAN. Don't try. Exchange into an Indian regiment, you'll get active service there. Get away from this cursed London for a year or two, and then come back, marry a good girl, settle down, and leave the rest to your aunt and—to me.

BEAU. You? Do you mean to say you will help me again?

STAN. Go abroad—do something worthy the name of a soldier, of a Beauclerk; give up being the military lounge, as you just called yourself. Prove that you can do this, and when you come back, for her sake, I will do all I can for you.

BEAU. For her sake? (*pause*) Can't I do something to help *you*? I know I am young, and you are twenty years older than I am, and perhaps I oughtn't to speak to you on such a subject, but I can't help seeing the change that has come over you since your separation from your wife, since you left Westhorpe. I know nobody knows the real truth, but isn't there something to be done?

something that will bring you two together again? Whatever has caused your separation can surely be explained, and, if not, can at any rate be forgotten—perhaps forgiven.

STAN. If I were to say that there is nothing to forget—to forgive?

BEAU. You mean——

STAN. If—mind I say if—if the reason that caused my wife to leave me existed only in her imagination, that in fact it never existed at all, being only a miserable suspicion, doubt, developed by means of unfortunate circumstantial evidence—mind, I only say if—what would you then think?

BEAU. Why, that you should tell her so openly, and ask her to——

STAN. To forgive what never existed, eh? No, Reggie, if reconciliation comes at all, it must come through her. She left me—I did not leave her.

BEAU. Then, if she came back, you would be as you once were?

STAN. Yes, if she realized the wrong she had done me.

BEAU. Uncle, tell me the truth. I—I want to help you if I can.

STAN. Sit down, Reggie. Light a cigarette. I *will* tell you the truth. (*pause*) About two years before I married your aunt, I met a woman named Kitty Davis.

BEAU. Not the woman who used to sing at that beastly low place, the Oriental?

STAN. Yes, she has come *down* the theatrical ladder since I knew her seventeen years ago; then she was a star, a burlesque actress at one of the best West End theatres. Well, she pleased me, and for a time I even thought I loved her, and went so far as actually to propose marriage, when she told me she had a husband living. Well, it ended like all such stories do, in disillusion. So, we dissolved partnership; but thinking I was doing right I instructed my solicitors to pay her a certain sum quarterly. This I allowed to go on until she began blackmailing me for more, threatening, if I refused, to inform my wife. Well, I did refuse—with the result you can guess. Kitty Davis saw my wife, produced the receipts for the money my solicitors had paid her, and swore that our liason had continued ever since. My wife refused all explanation, believed the worst, and left me.

BEAU. May I tell her the truth?

STAN. *No. (firmly)* Reggie, you are a good fellow, and I thank you, but you can do nothing for me in this affair. There is an old adage—"Never interfere between husband and wife." It's a very old one—but it's a very *true one*. Take your cheque, my boy, and be off to the club; pay this Captain Vallaris and tell him from me, at the same time, that for two pins I would have knocked your debt off the two thousand he still owes me. *(pause)* Will you come back to dinner? I'm all alone.

BEAU. I'm afraid I shan't have time to get this matter settled, dress, and get back here. At any rate, don't wait for me, and, if I can't, I'll run in after.

STAN. Just as you like, my lad. *(STANMORE drops into chair and takes up newspaper. BEAUCLERK goes up to door as if to exit, then comes back and places his hand on his uncle's shoulder)*

BEAU. Uncle, you're a brick. *(shakes hands and then rapidly exits)*

STAN. A brick. How easy it is to be a brick, a good fellow amongst your fellow men, if only you have money. *Plenty of money*. Well, it buys most things, luxuries, pleasures; it buys most men, and a fair percentage of women, and yet there is one thing it can't buy for me now,—happiness. For twenty years I have worked night and day to achieve my present position; to be able to say to myself, John Stanmore, you are worth so many thousands, John Stanhope, you are one of the twenty men in this great city of London; and now, when the time has come, what does it bring me? Position, yes, power, yes, but happiness, alas—No! *(sighing)* Ah! sometimes I wish myself back to the old struggling days of clerkdom. I *was* happy then—there was more joy in the weekly salary than in all the thousands that now roll into my bank. And when I first met Mary down at dear old Muskhurst; the Mary who, fifteen years ago, became my wife; the Mary for whom I have striven and toiled! Yes, I was happy *then*. And since? Yes; I have been happy since—happy ever since—until she left me, three months ago—*(going up to the easel and drawing drapery away from the picture)* left me, believing I was false to her. And now, because she would not hear me, would not even allow me to explain, my home is broken, my life not worth the living, and all happiness is gone. *(lets*

drapery fall over picture and comes down stage) Yet most men would call me a fool, a quixotic fool. I can hear them saying, Why not be as others are, Stanmore? Why not do as others do? Is your case any different to the thousand of other couples who find themselves drifting apart? Come, come, think it over seriously, and don't be such a fool. There are plenty of other women in the world—yes, plenty, my worthy friends; plenty. Sentiment, eh! absolutely idiotic sentiment I know it is; yet I shall wait and yet I shall hope; wait for the day when she will come back to me; hope for the time when we shall be together again. *(goes to desk and writes another cheque, leaving cheque-book on table—then rings bell)*

Enter KNIGHT.

KNIGHT. Yes, sir.

STAN. I want you to go round to Charing Cross Hospital—you will have plenty of time before dinner—present my compliments to Dr. Knevitt and give him this cheque, and say that I will hold myself responsible for all expense incurred as regards that poor woman, Kitty Davis.

KNIGHT. The case as was in the papers this morning, sir? Kitty Davis; the girl as used to sing at the Oriental? Why, I've seen her heaps of times. Run over, wasn't she, sir? Ah, it's hard to come down in life like she has; and now the papers say she hasn't a friend in the world.

STAN. Give my message to Dr. Knevitt, and say I shall be annoyed if he states in any way from where the assistance comes—and don't forget she is to have everything that is required. I'm going to dress. Have dinner punctually at 8. Mr. Beauclerk may probably dine with me. *(exit STANMORE into room)*

KNIGHT. It's a pleasure to serve a man like that. What does he know of Kitty Davis? Why, nothing; he only reads it in the papers, but he puts his hand into his pocket like the real good-un he is, and takes jolly good care nobody knows anything about it. That's what I like; none of your nasty advertising tricks. That's what I call real charity. *(bell is heard to ring. KNIGHT goes to outer hall and opens door)*

Enter MARY STANMORE, a very handsome woman, aristocratic in appearance, about 35, is veiled.

MARY. Is Mr. Stanmore in ?

KNIGHT. Yes, ma'am.

MARY. Can I see him ?

KNIGHT. Mr. Stanmore is dressing, if you will give me your name, I will take it to him.

MARY. (*lifting her veil*) Don't you know me, Knight ?

KNIGHT. Mrs. Stanmore !!!

MARY. Don't disturb Mr. Stanmore ; I will wait here till he comes.

KNIGHT. Yes, ma'am. (*goes up to door, then looking back*) I shall see that cellar again, after all. (*exit*

KNIGHT. MARY STANMORE *walks about, looking at room*)

MARY. Am I right in coming here, or would it have been better to have told my father the whole truth ? Yet he is so old, so weak, and the doctors say he must have no excitement. (*pause, still looking about*) So this is for what we separated, to come back to this—chambers ! To leave the lovely old place in the country, to shut up our house in town, and all for this ! Only three months ago, three little months, and I had no suspicion that the husband I loved and thought one of the best men in the world, had been for years deceiving me. Only three months ago since I told him I could no longer live with him. Why, why didn't I remain in ignorance ? What good have I done ? None, none. Why did the knowledge of that wretched woman come between us ? (*pause*) How will he receive me ? Will he be angry ? I have no right here, and he may tell me so. (*goes to desk and sees cheque-book on table and reads counterfoil*) Kitty Davis, twenty pounds. Even here, the first thing I see. Why will men be such brutes ? He had my love, all that I could give him, and yet he could leave my side for such as this. (*touching cheque*) Kitty Davis. Yes, men are brutes and women are fools to love them. Well, it is perhaps for the best—it hardens one, it kills all desire for reconciliation, it destroys all pity, all forgiveness.

Enter JOHN STANMORE ; he passes desk without seeing her, then turns.

STAN. Mary—you—you here !

MARY. Yes. I—I want to see you on a family matter—my father.

JOHN. (*anxiously*) Not ill, I hope?

MARY. No, but he is far from well, and his sight is worse. He is up in town to-day to see the oculist. He knows nothing of our separation, as you know. When we parted, three months ago, we both agreed that it was best he should think things were as they always used to be.

JOHN. Yes—well, what then?

MARY. He wrote me saying he was coming up to town, and as the examination would necessarily be a somewhat tedious one, he would prefer to stay the night in town with us. Do you understand? *With us.*

STAN. You still wish the truth to be kept from him?

MARY. He is very old, and his health is fast failing; would it do any good?

STAN. No, yet I do not quite follow you. What do you wish done?

MARY. Our house in Stanhope Street is dismantled, as you know, and I couldn't take him to a hotel, as he would be sure to ask for you, and then——

STAN. You might have to explain to him—to your father—you would have to tell him why you left me.

MARY. Is there any need to go over old ground?

STAN. None. What you did you did alone, and the responsibility rests only with you. Let that pass. What do you wish me to do?

MARY. It is only for one night. You have two or three rooms I believe here?

STAN. Yes—you wish me to——

MARY. To receive him here as if nothing had happened—to give up this one evening to acting a lie—you and I; anything to save him the knowledge of our separation.

STAN. Can it always be kept from him?

MARY. Yes, he is hardly ever in London. Down at Muskham no one knows the truth, and even if they did, would, for my sake, keep silent.

STAN. For your sake. Don't you think I have a stake in this affair? Your father is, and always was, very dear to me. In the years gone by, he rendered me a service that few men render one another. He saved me—saved my credit in the great panic in '84. That is a long time

ago, but I haven't forgotten it, nor am I likely ever to.
(*pause*) Your father returns to Muskham Grange to-morrow?

MARY. (*nervously*) Yes—I—I have taken it for granted that you—you would consent; so, as my father wished to call at his club, I gave him this address and told him to come on to us in a cab.

STAN. You were certain I should fall in with your views?

MARY. I thought you would do it for his sake, if not for mine.

STAN. And you were right—quite right. Let me fully understand. I do not wish to contradict you in any way. What excuse have you given him about the house in Stanhope Street?

MARY. Only that we were having extensive alterations and that the place was topsy-turvy with workmen.

STAN. Yes, that will do. I have two rooms besides this—your father can have the one there (*pointing to the L.*) and you the other; I will go to the Grand.

MARY. Must we turn you out?

STAN. It is better. I will remain until your father retires, and I shall be back before he is up to-morrow.

MARY. You will do your best, while he is here, to make him think—think we are still together?

STAN. Yes.

MARY. Thank you.

STAN. Hadn't you better remove your hat and cloak? I am sorry I have no maid to attend you.

MARY. How stupid! Of course I will. This room? (*indicating room*)

STAN. Yes—the switch is on your left as you enter. (*bell is heard*) Ah, there's the cab. You had better hurry; and when your father is here don't forget to play your part. Don't forget that. (MARY STANMORE *looks at her husband as if not understanding; then exits*)

KNIGHT *enters and opens door in hall. Enter SQUIRE HEATHCOTE assisted by KNIGHT—is met by JOHN STANMORE, who leads him to fireplace.*

STAN. (*quite cheerily*) Ah, my dear Squire, this is kind of you to take us like this. Now, let me help you off with your coat; now your hat—gloves—why, your hands are quite cold! Knight, a liqueur of brandy at once.

That's better. Now take my arm and come and sit by the fire. (*places SQUIRE HEATHCOTE in chair*)

SQUIRE. Ah! (*sigh of comfort*. KNIGHT *brings liqueur*) My dear John—I—I couldn't.

STAN. Nonsense! Come, consider me your doctor and drink it. You've believed one medical man to-day and probably accepted his prescription, so you may just as well equalise it by accepting mine. (*SQUIRE drinks*) Well, what does the doctor say?

SQUIRE. Hope—my dear John—he gives me hope; he anticipates that by a small operation my sight may be restored for five or six years. Think of it, John; five or six years. Why it—it has made me feel ten years younger.

STAN. Then to-day you are only seventy instead of eighty.

SQUIRE. Ah! Ah! that's good, my boy, very good. Come here, let me have a look at you. Oh, I can see better than you think. (*gazing at him quite close*) You are looking older, John. Too much business, too much anxiety, too much excitement. Why don't you give it up. You have everything you want, a loving wife, plenty of money, why not give up town and retire to Westhorpe?

STAN. Ah, Squire, one mustn't be selfish, you see. If I thought only of myself, why——

SQUIRE. Yes—yes—of course; I understand—the women; they must have their little vanities, their dresses, their box at the opera, their season in town—of course—of course. Well, well, tell me what improvements you are making at Stanhope Street—why—why, you extravagant fellow, it was only last year that you had a positive army of workmen on your wife's new reception-room. What on earth are you up to now?

STAN. Oh—we—we discovered a sinking of the east wall three months ago—and Mary—Mary (*enter MARY STANMORE*) said it must be put right—so—so——

SQUIRE. Yes, John.

STAN. Let me give you a cigar, I have still some of your favorites left.

SQUIRE. You are a good fellow, John, and Mary ought to think herself a lucky woman—a very lucky woman. I—I believe if Providence had given me a son, I couldn't have liked him better than I do you.

STAN. Thank you, Squire.

MARY. (*coming down from door*) And where do I come in, father?

SQUIRE. Where you always do. Ah, John, you have a golden treasure here, and thank God you have known how to take care of it. (*passing his hand gently over MARY'S face*) I had only two of them. Mary and her elder sister Kate; and she, poor child, went years ago.

MARY. But there's her son Reggie, you mustn't forget him.

SQUIRE. Ah, I know what a favorite he is of yours. By the way, has he been getting on better lately?

MARY. (*nervously*) Oh—oh, he—he——

STAN. (*interrupting*) He's just left here; came to tell me he was sick of being a lounge; so he was going to exchange into the Indian Line, where he is sure to get active service. He asked me what I advised, so I told him to go. By the way, he may dine with us to-night.

SQUIRE. Ah, that's right, nothing like work; for a young man, there's nothing like work.

MARY. (*looking at STANMORE over SQUIRE'S head*) Thank you.

SQUIRE. Come, draw your chair up to the fire, so that I may see you both; or, better still, Mary, let me see you sitting in your favorite position at John's feet. Come, come, all society habits must be given up when I come to stay. (*MARY looks at STANMORE, then takes cushion and places it on floor at STANMORE'S feet, then, hesitating, sits*)

SQUIRE. Ah! that's splendid. Now give John a kiss for being such a good fellow. (*business.* MARY *kisses* STANMORE) What time do we dine, John?

STAN. Eight—in about half an hour.

SQUIRE. Excellent. Lucky I dressed at the club, so shall have time to quietly finish my cigar. Ah! Mary, this makes one think of the old times; takes one back years and years, and recalls the memory of your dear mother. Ah! how I missed her.

MARY. Father, you mustn't think of such things to-night.

SQUIRE. Quite right, my girl, but don't think they are sad thoughts, because they are not. It's seeing you two

together that makes me recall the old happy days. It is seeing you thus united, so thoroughly understanding one another, so attached, that reminds me when my own married life was so nearly wrecked by foolish pride.

MARY. What, you and mother? Why, you were always a regular pair of turtle doves; never content unless you were with one another.

SQUIRE. Yet, Mary, there was once a storm even in our married career.

MARY. Tell me of it, father. (*somewhat excitedly*)

SQUIRE. It happened, my girl, when you and your sister were quite little ones, yet why I tell you now, I don't know, except that the air to-night seems full of old memories. (*pause*) I had a friend, Roger Silvester, your godfather, my Mary; we had been boys together, and even after our marriage he was always with us. Yet somehow or other jealousy entered into my heart and I grew day by day more suspicious of his attentions to my wife, until, in a mad moment, I accused her of it. At first she laughed and then, seeing I was in earnest, at once offered an explanation. This I scorned, and in my rage, refused to listen.

STAN. And the end?

SQUIRE. The end came that night. Muskham Grange, our old home, was without a mistress. My wife had left me.

STAN. And then? (*looking keenly at MARY*)

SQUIRE. Then came three weeks of loneliness, three weeks of such misery, as, thank God, I have never known again; when, once more, happiness was brought me by chance. Silvester came to see me, knowing nothing, and expecting to find us together. Broken down in spirit and health, I told him all, and learnt the truth. That night I went with him to ask forgiveness of the best wife man ever had, and the next day Muskham Grange had its mistress back. (*looking at his watch*) Ten minutes to eight and you dine at eight. Dear, dear me, how the time flies! (*rising*) I must be making myself respectable.

STAN. Mary, show your father his room. (*MARY goes to R.*) No, no, not that one. You know you decided. (*as if to cover her mistake*)

MARY. (*uneasily*) Of course, how stupid of me—this way, father, this way, take my arm. (*crossing to L.*)

STAN. Don't trouble, my dear. I—I am not quite so helpless as you think. (MARY opens door L. down for SQUIRE to pass out, then closes door and stands listening. MARY and STANMORE look at one another. Business)

Enter KNIGHT, with letter in hand. STANMORE turns up stage.

STAN. Well, Knight?

KNIGHT. I've been to Charing Cross Hospital, sir, and—

STAN. Yes, speak up, Knight. What is it?

KNIGHT. I'm a little bit upset, sir. You see, when I got to the Hospital and gave your message to Dr. Knevitt, I thought things were—well, as they were, but they weren't, for it seems that the poor woman, Kitty Davis—

MARY. Kitty Davis? (excitedly)

KNIGHT. Yes, ma'am, Kitty Davis as used to sing at the Oriental.

STAN. Well, what did Dr. Knevitt say? (all this quick)

KNIGHT. You see, sir, there was nothing he could say for—for Kitty Davis was dead.

MARY. Kitty Davis dead!!

STAN. Dead!

KNIGHT. Yes, sir, she died at three o'clock this afternoon.

STAN. Did the doctor send me any message?

KNIGHT. Only this, sir. (holding out letter) Dr. Knevitt desired me to give it you; he said it was the last thing the poor woman wrote. (hands letter to STANMORE)

STAN. Thank you, Knight. You had better see about dinner at once. It must be close on eight.

KNIGHT. It wants five minutes yet, sir. (goes to door—then aside) Poor Kitty Davis!

STAN. (looking at letter and just about to open it) Stay, this is not for me, it is for—for my wife. A message from the dead. Does it contain good or evil I wonder? Mary, a little while ago, I sent Knight with a message to the resident surgeon at Charing Cross Hospital. A reply has come—but—it is addressed to you; it is from the poor patient herself. Will you open it? (offering letter to MARY. Business)

MARY. (*taking letter*) I—I want to speak to you first. My father's story of the past has made me think of what I have done, John. Like him I refused to listen, to hear from you any explanation of our great trouble. My pride was hurt; I constituted myself your judge, and I believed, I was right. Now—now I think, I may have been in error—John—I ask you now—can you—will you explain?

STAN. (*quietly*) Read that letter. I don't know what it contains, but there is some strange fatality at work to-night. God knows how it will end. Read that letter. (*MARY reads letter, her face becomes full of sorrow and she suddenly throws herself into armchair, sobbing violently, still holding letter in hand*)

STAN. No—no, don't give way.

MARY. Ah, you were right to despise me, for I have wronged you! Hear what she sends me. (*opening letter and reading through her tears*) "I am a dying woman, and I wish to ease my soul of one evil thing I have done. When I came to you and told you the story about your husband, I lied. He was the only man who treated me as a *woman*, and I repaid his kindness by falsehood and treachery. Seventeen years ago he *was* something to me, but since then I have never even seen him. This I swear to you on my deathbed. Forgive me if you can.—KITTY DAVIS." (*pause*) Oh, how you must hate me!!!

STAN. (*very reserved*) Mary dear, (*taking letter from her hand*) shall I tear this up? You and I will never want it again. Shall we try and begin again, shall we try and forget that this incident ever happened, and shall we forgive one another?

MARY. No—no, it is for me to implore, to plead for forgiveness; not you. I was foolish—wicked——

STAN. And I was proud.

MARY. (*looking up*) Can you indeed forgive me? can you?

STAN. Look. (*tears up letter*) See, there goes the ugly shadow of the past; now we have only the future to think of.

MARY. (*rising and placing her hands on STANMORE'S shoulders*) And can I help you in it?

STAN. (*drawing her into his arms*) As only the woman I love can. (*embraces and kisses her*)

Enter REGGIE BEAUCLERK in evening dress—stands up stage after noticing them—they separate.

BEAU. Well, I never ! Hullo, aunt, what on earth brings you up to town ? (REGGIE goes to STANMORE) I am awfully glad—awfully.

STAN. (*aside*) What about Vallaris ?

BEAU. There's my I. O. U.

STAN. Ssh ! Tear it up. (*aside*)

MARY. How are you, Reggie ?

BEAU. Alright now, but I was very bad this afternoon I can tell you. Look what that good fellow of a husband of yours has done for me. (*to STANMORE*) No, I will tell her. I—I got into another devil of a scrape and like the brick he is, he's put it straight for me. Oh, I'm not conceited, my dear aunt, he didn't do it for my sake, he told me that plainly enough—all he said was, there's the money, don't worry my wife.

MARY. (*tearfully*) John, don't punish me any more !

Enter SQUIRE HEATHCOTE L. REGGIE goes to him.

BEAU. How do you do, sir ?

SQUIRE. Well, you young scapegrace, so I hear you are going to India.

BEAU. Yes, sir.

SQUIRE. Ugh ; if you want anything before you go, don't forget you have a grandfather.

BEAU. No, sir ; I promise you I won't.

Enter KNIGHT from lobby.

KNIGHT. Dinner is served. (*remains up*)

STAN. Reggie, in the absence of other ladies, take the Squire into dinner. (*they pass out arm in arm laughing*) Knight, we are going back to Westhorpe next week. I think you'd better go down to-morrow, just to look after your cellar. Mary, will you come with me ? (*they pass happily out as KNIGHT smilingly opens door for them*)

CURTAIN.

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